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SPECIAL ANALYSIS

USSR-POLAND: Moscow's Strategy

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The USSR is increasing pressure on the Kania regime to take more resolute action against dissidents and against the militants in Solidarity and to complete plans for the possible use of martial law. The Soviets are pursuing these tactics partly to strengthen the resolve of the Polish party and to test the reliability of the Polish military. They presumably want to see whether this line of action is effective before deciding on their own use of force.

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The communique following the summit last week in Moscow between the Soviet and Polish leaders underscores the Kremlin's dissatisfaction with the Kania regime's performance. It states that Poland "was and will be"--rather than "is"--a reliable link in the socialist community and for the first time raised the Brezhnev Doctrine in reference to the Polish situation ████████

The growing ferment among rank-and-file members for liberalization of the Polish party is of increasing concern to the Soviet leaders. Soviet confidence in First Secretary Kania and the Polish party appears lower than at any time since the crisis began last July. Moscow's approval of the unprecedented appointment of a military officer, General Jaruzelski, to head a Communist government is the clearest indication that it recognizes that the Polish party has become bankrupt. ████

A Polish diplomat in Moscow reports that the Soviets told Kania last week to delay indefinitely the extraordinary party congress, which had originally been scheduled for early next month. The Brezhnev leadership's fear in 1968 that a coming party congress in Czechoslovakia would oust the remaining pro-Soviets and institutionalize party liberalization was a major factor in the decision to invade. Moscow apparently has similar fears about a Polish congress and wishes to take no chances. ████

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The Soviets have no clear alternative to Kania as party leader. Despite his poor record, they probably do not doubt his loyalty or fear that he is a potential Polish Dubcek. They probably also consider that his replacement at this point by a hardliner might further damage the Polish party. Nevertheless, one of the few remaining moves the Soviets can take short of military action is to sack Kania, and, if he balks at fully implementing Moscow's current strategy, the Soviets will consider playing that card.

Demanding Action

The summit communique also indicates that Moscow will no longer tolerate procrastination and compromise by the Polish party. It states that a "firm and resolute rebuff" to Poland's internal and external enemies is "particularly urgent" and that a "radical improvement" of the situation is necessary.

The Soviets apparently want Kania immediately to fulfill his repeated pledges to seize the initiative from Solidarity.

The Polish regime's brief detentions over the last 10 days of dissident leaders Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik appear to be a direct outcome of the summit in Moscow. The Kremlin will press Warsaw to follow up on these moves to isolate the dissidents from Solidarity—the first step in an attack that the Soviets will want eventually to be aimed at the union itself.

Outlook

Moscow apparently is pushing Kania to adopt a more forceful policy, even though it has doubts about his ability to make it work. [redacted] some Soviet military leaders question the reliability of the Polish armed forces if called upon to enforce martial law. The Soviets probably believe that under these circumstances there is a high risk of uncontrolled violence that would require direct Soviet military intervention. [redacted]

At this point, it is unclear whether Moscow has decided to accept this risk. The Soviet leaders' probably still hope that the regime can somehow contain the reaction by Solidarity that a crackdown on the dissidents would bring. If public order does break down, however, the Soviets would be in a better position to justify a military intervention to world opinion. [redacted]